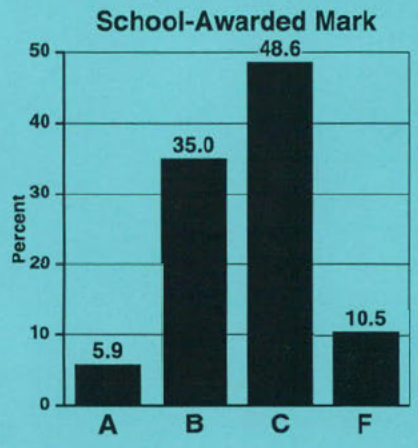
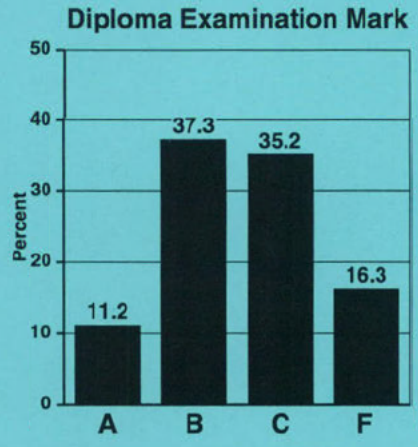
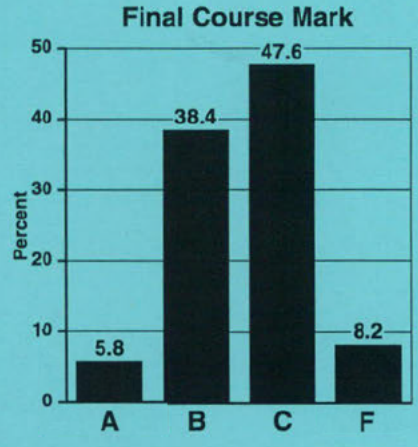
Social Studies 33

Diploma Examination Results
Examiners' Report for January 1998







The summary information in this report provides teachers, school administrators, and students with an overview of results from the January 1998 administration of the Social Studies 33 Diploma Examination. This information is most helpful when used in conjunction with the detailed school and jurisdiction reports that have been provided to schools and school jurisdiction offices. A provincial report containing a detailed analysis of the combined January, April, June, and August results is made available annually.

Description of the Examination

The Social Studies 33 Diploma Examination consists of 60 multiple-choice questions worth 60% and four writing assignments worth 40% of the total examination mark.

Achievement of Standards

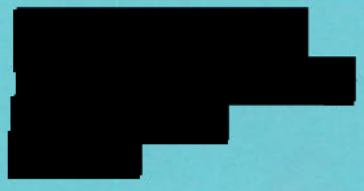
The information reported is based on the final course marks achieved by 5 828 students who wrote the January 1998 examination.

- 91.8% of these students achieved the acceptable standard (a final course mark of 50% or higher).
- 5.8% of these students achieved the standard of excellence (a final course mark of 80% or higher).

Overall, student achievement in Social Studies 33 was satisfactory. Students demonstrated a good understanding of Social Studies knowledge and skills on the multiple-choice questions; however, the writing assignments presented greater difficulty for many students. The average score on the writing assignments was significantly lower than the average score on the multiple-choice questions, but was somewhat higher than on earlier administrations.

Provincial Averages

- The average school-awarded mark was 61.7%.
- The average diploma examination mark was 63.3%.
- The average final course mark, representing an equal weighting of the school-awarded mark and the diploma examination mark, was 62.9%.



Multiple-Choice Questions

Examination Blueprint

There are 60 multiple-choice questions each worth one mark. Questions are classified in two ways: according to the curricular content area (topic) being tested and according to the knowledge and skill objectives required to answer the question. The examination blueprint illustrates the distribution of questions in January 1998 according to these classifications.

All questions on the diploma examination require students to demonstrate knowledge of social studies content and to apply social studies skills to that knowledge base. The reporting categories below define the general types of questions that appear on the examination and the categories for which information is reported.

		Question Classification by Topic		Total Questions
		Topic A: Political and Economic Systems	**Topic B: Global Interaction in the 20th Century**	
		Knowledge and application of facts, concepts, and generalizations related to the world's political and economic systems as outlined in the *Program of Studies.*	Knowledge and application of facts, concepts, and generalizations related to the interaction of nations since 1918 as outlined in the *Program of Studies.*	
Question Classification by Knowlege and Skill Objectives	**Understanding Information and Ideas** These questions require students to demonstrate their knowledge and comprehension of generalizations, key concepts, and related facts and content.	1, 2, 3, 7, 9, 11, 15, 16, 17, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27	32, 33, 34, 38, 39, 41, 43, 44, 49, 50, 51, 52, 54, 57, 58	30
	Interpreting Information and Ideas These questions require students to use their understanding of social studies to analyze and interpret information and ideas.	4, 5, 10, 12, 14, 18, 21, 28, 29	31, 35, 37, 40, 42, 45, 46, 47, 53, 55, 56	20
	Applying Information and Ideas These questions require students to demonstrate their understanding of social studies by applying information and ideas.	6, 8, 13, 19, 20, 30	36, 48, 59, 60	10
	Total Questions	**30**	**30**	**60**

*Subtest Results**

Results are reported in average raw scores. Total of all multiple-choice questions: 40.7 out of 60

by Topic

- •Political and Economic Systems: 20.5 out of 30
- •Global Interaction in the 20th Century: 20.1 out of 30

by Knowledge and Skill Objectives

- •Understanding Information and Ideas: 20.2 out of 30
- •Interpreting Information and Ideas: 13.7 out of 20
- •Applying Information and Ideas: 6.7 out of 10

*Readers are cautioned **not** to compare subtest results because the subtests are not of equal difficulty. Instead, readers should compare these provincial subtest results with their own school results.

Question-by-Question Results

Question	Key	Difficulty*
1	D	87.6
2	C	78.2
3	B	70.8
4	D	82.9
5	A	71.3
6	B	65.9
7	A	37.5
8	D	91.6
9	D	75.3
10	A	62.7
11	B	56.6
12	D	67.7
13	A	85.7
14	C	79.2
15	A	49.9
16	A	72.0
17	C	77.7
18	C	59.2
19	B	51.8
20	A	78.4
21	B	78.9
22	A	57.5
23	B	52.3
24	C	57.1
25	B	65.7
26	C	70.6
27	D	48.9
28	B	84.4
29	B	78.1
30	D	58.3
31	C	73.4
32	C	69.6
33	A	63.8
34	D	62.7
35	D	74.7
36	C	68.7
37	D	55.3
38	B	74.3
39	A	62.7
40	C	63.2
41	D	80.2
42	A	73.8
43	A	72.6
44	C	79.2
45	C	36.3
46	D	60.8
47	B	48.3
48	B	69.6
49	C	64.2
50	D	64.9
51	B	87.1
52	D	74.7
53	B	70.5
54	A	76.7
55	C	68.8
56	D	84.8
57	B	62.6
58	C	69.7
59	B	56.1
60	A	44.0

*Difficulty—percentage of students answering the question correctly

The table at the left shows question-by-question results and the keyed answers. Parallel tables in the school and jurisdiction reports show the percentage of students who selected each alternative. By comparing school and jurisdiction results with provincial results presented here, teachers can determine areas of strength and weakness in the achievement of their students and, consequently, areas of potential strength and weakness in their programs.

Examiners' Comments

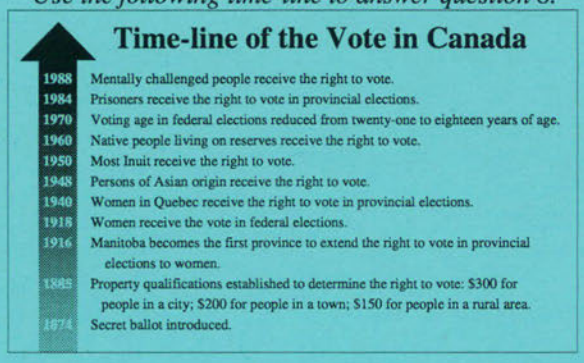
The multiple-choice questions require students to go beyond simply recalling information to apply their knowledge and thinking skills. Students must demonstrate that they understand social studies concepts; that they comprehend historical, political, and economic relationships; and that they can interpret and evaluate social studies information and ideas.

The following table gives results for six questions selected from the examination. The table shows the percentage of students, in five groups, that answered each question correctly. The comments on pages 4 and 5 discuss some of the decisions that students may have made and some of the skills they may have used to answer these questions correctly.

Percentage of Students Correctly Answering Selected Multiple-Choice Questions

	Question Number					
Student Group	**8**	**17**	**32**	**39**	**45**	**54**
All students	91.6	77.7	69.6	62.7	36.3	76.7
Students achieving the *standard of excellence* (80% or higher, or A) on the whole examination	99.5	94.6	93.5	86.8	68.7	96.8
Students achieving the *acceptable standard* who received marks between 65% and 79%, or B, on the whole examination	98.2	90.1	84.1	72.7	43.1	91.9
Students achieving the *acceptable standard* who received marks between 50% and 64%, or C, on the whole examination	91.8	74.5	60.9	55.5	26.8	71.8
Students who have not achieved the *acceptable standard* (49% or less) on the whole examination	70.5	44.5	39.0	39.1	18.8	38.9

Use the following time-line to answer question 8.


Time-line of the Vote in Canada
1988 Mentally challenged people receive the right to vote.
1984 Prisoners receive the right to vote in provincial elections.
1970 Voting age in federal elections reduced from twenty-one to eighteen years of age.
1960 Native people living on reserves receive the right to vote.
1950 Most Inuit receive the right to vote.
1948 Persons of Asian origin receive the right to vote.
1940 Women in Quebec receive the right to vote in provincial elections.
1918 Women receive the vote in federal elections.
1916 Manitoba becomes the first province to extend the right to vote in provincial elections to women.
1885 Property qualifications established to determine the right to vote: $300 for people in a city; $200 for people in a town; $150 for people in a rural area.
1874 Secret ballot introduced.

8. This time-line indicates that over a period of 114 years, Canadian democracy

- **A.** became less able to function smoothly because of ethnic differences
- **B.** faced many international crises that affected national political affairs
- **C.** increased the level of regulation and control of the daily lives of average citizens
- ***D.** removed many barriers that prevented citizens from participating in the democratic process

Question 8 proved to be the easiest question on the examination. Of all students, 91.6% selected the correct answer. Among students achieving the *standard of excellence*, 99.5% selected the correct response. Even among students who *did not achieve the acceptable standard*, 70.5% selected the correct response. Clearly, students had little difficulty in interpreting this time-line. These results are encouraging, given that students had to make the connection between the expansion of the franchise in Canada and the idea of "participating in the democratic process" as expressed in the correct response. Having a large proportion of graduating students recognize what is meant by the "democratic process" is very significant, given the emphasis placed on participatory citizenship in the social studies curriculum.

---

17. What Lenin's New Economic Policy, Roosevelt's New Deal, and Gorbachev's perestroika have in common is that all were introduced

- **A.** during wartime
- **B.** to promote capitalist ideals
- ***C.** to revive failing economies
- **D.** during a time of political stability

The results for **question 17** are also encouraging. This question, which may initially appear straightforward, requires students to synthesize knowledge in order to recognize an appropriate generalization. The three national leaders mentioned in the question governed at different times in the twentieth century and came from two sharply differing ideological camps. Despite these fairly rigorous expectations, 77.7% of all students recognized the correct generalization from among the four offered. This question did, however, discriminate more sharply at the four levels of achievement than did question 8. Of students who *achieved the standard of excellence*, 94.6% selected the correct response. There is a small decline in success among the students *achieving the acceptable standard:* 84.1% of the students with a mark on the whole exam between 65% and 79% selecting the correct response. For students whose mark on the whole exam was between 50% and 64%, the success rate drops further to 74.5%. Finally, among students who *did not achieve the acceptable standard*, 44.5% selected the correct response. The generally high success rate on this question is evidence that many of Alberta's Social Studies 33 students have grasped some of the broader generalizations that can be drawn from course content.

32. Which of the following provisions of the Treaty of Versailles **best** reflected the principle of national self-determination for ethnic groups?

- **A.** Germany was forbidden to have an air force or submarine fleet.
- **B.** The victors in the First World War received reparation payments.
- ***C.** Yugoslavia, Poland, and Czechoslovakia became independent countries.
- **D.** Signing nations automatically became members of the League of Nations.

Question 32 proved to be of average difficulty—69.6% of all students selected the correct response. This question tested students' understanding of a central concept in Social Studies 33: self-determination. As might be expected, this question proved to be most challenging for students who *did not achieve the acceptable standard* on the whole examination. Among this group, 39.0% selected the correct response. As might also be expected, results progressively improve with the level of student achievement: of students achieving the *standard of excellence*, 93.5% identified the correct response. Further discussion of this question will be included in the commentary for question 54, since both questions, in differing ways, tested students' understanding of self-determination.

39. The **immediate** result of the Japanese attack on the naval base at Pearl Harbor in 1941 was the

*A. United States' entry into the Second World War on the Allied side
B. inclusion of Japan in the Axis Alliance with Italy and Germany
C. withdrawal of British military forces from Eastern Asia
D. United States' bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki

Observation of student results of both the multiple-choice questions and writing assignments has consistently shown that a significant number of students experience difficulty in placing historic events accurately within a chronological framework. This was again made evident on the January 1998 examination in **question 39**. Students were required to identify an immediate result of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. This question, although not overly difficult (62.7% of all students selected the correct response) is interesting in that by far the most popular incorrect response was alternative "D," which was selected by 28.9% of all students. This raises the question of why such a significant proportion of students chose this response. One possible reason is that students did not read the question stem closely and missed the key word, "immediate," in which case choice "D" becomes a more credible answer. Another possibility is that it is likely that almost all students would be aware of the infamous event described in choice "D." Some students may have been attracted to it because it is an event easily remembered. Whatever the reason, the results for this question reinforce the need for students to develop a better chronological understanding of key historical events.

Use the following diagram to answer question 45.

45. Which of the following titles completes this diagram?

A. UN Peacekeepers Enforce Ceasefire Agreements
B. Conflicts Involving Limited Use of Nuclear Weapons
*C. Confrontations Between Anti-Soviet and Pro-Soviet Forces
D. The Cold War Ends: Communism Collapses in Eastern Europe

Question 45 proved to be the most difficult of all the questions on the January 1998 examination. The correct response was selected by 36.3% of all students. This question discriminated significantly between the various achievement levels, as is indicated on the results table on page 3 (68.7% of the highest achieving group selected the correct response, compared with 18.8% of the lowest achieving group). Two wrong alternatives proved to be strong draws, with 32.9% of all students selecting alternative "A" and 23.3% of all students selecting alternative "D." It is hard to determine why this question proved to be so difficult; however, the appeal of choice "A" among all groups other that the highest achievers suggests that students were drawn to this distracter since the diagram lists crisis locations, and UN involvement typically occurred at such locations. The draw to alternative "D" is more perplexing, given the range of dates supplied in the source and the inclusion of Afghanistan, two factors which negate this answer.

---

54. Woodrow Wilson's ideas about self-determination for distinct national groups could be used by a person who supports

*A. Quebec achieving sovereignty from Canada
B. the United States taking over Cuba
C. Canada withdrawing from the United Nations
D. the Maritime provinces joining the United States

Self-determination was again the concept tested in **question 54**. This question is interesting in that students were asked to apply their knowledge of self-determination to a specific modern-day situation, rather than to recall an example of historical self-determination, as in question 32. Interestingly, question 54 was the easier of the two. Among all students, 76.7% selected the correct response, compared with 69.6% for question 32. The most marked improvement in achievement between the two questions, among the subgroups, was for the students achieving the acceptable standard. It is encouraging to see that these students demonstrated the ability to apply a concept that is typically dealt with as a historical fact in a different context—that of a current situation. This is an important skill that social studies educators work to develop in their students, obviously with some success.

Writing Assignments

The Social Studies 33 examination contains four writing assignments positioned throughout the examination. Each assignment is related to a specific curricular theme and assesses several skills. Readers will find the written-response results most meaningful in the context of the assignments and the scoring descriptors.

The scoring criteria applied to evaluate student performance are the same for each assignment. These criteria are found on pages 31 and 32 of the 1997–98 *Social Studies 33 Information Bulletin, Diploma Examinations Program*. As a result of consultation with teachers serving as standard confirmers for the marking of the 1997 writing assignments, minor changes were made to the descriptors from those presented in the 1996–97 bulletin.

The table on this page outlines the requirements for each assignment, the categories for scoring each assignment, the amount each category contributes to the total mark of the examination, and the percentage of students achieving at the various levels. In January 1998, the average raw score for the writing assignment section of the examination was 22.5 out of 40.

The most useful starting place for reviewing the results is at the **Satisfactory 3** level. Such work exceeds the pass mark of 50%.

Examination Blueprint and Percentage Distribution of Scores

Description of the Writing Assignment*	Scoring Category	Proportion of Total Mark(%)	Percentage Distribution of Scores									
			Excellent		Competent		Satisfactory		Limited		Poor	
			5	4.5	4	3.5	3	2.5	2	1.5	1	Ins**
Writing Assignment I Contemporary Issues	Ideas and Support	7.5	2.9	4.9	16.4	17.9	30.1	14.4	9.7	2.1	1.1	0.6
	Communication of Ideas	2.5	3.0	5.1	16.6	19.7	36.5	11.5	5.6	1.0	0.4	0.6
Writing Assignment II Comprehension of Generalizations and Concepts	Ideas and Support	7.5	1.5	2.7	9.7	11.6	21.7	18.8	19.3	6.8	4.3	3.5
	Communication of Ideas	2.5	1.6	3.2	11.1	14.0	37.7	16.0	9.9	2.0	1.0	3.5
Writing Assignment III Interpretation of Visual Images	Ideas and Support	7.5	1.5	2.5	7.8	9.5	20.5	14.7	21.3	8.9	7.5	5.8
	Communication of Ideas	2.5	1.5	2.2	8.7	11.3	34.1	18.0	12.8	3.4	2.3	5.8
Writing Assignment IV Contemporary Issues	Ideas and Support	7.5	1.0	1.7	8.1	12.5	31.1	19.0	17.0	4.7	2.4	2.4
	Communication of Ideas	2.5	1.3	2.1	10.4	13.8	41.4	16.3	9.5	2.0	0.7	2.4

* See pages 20 and 21 of the 1997–98 *Social Studies 33 Information Bulletin* for a detailed description of the Writing Assignments.
** **Ins** (Insufficient) is a special category that includes students who did not attempt the assignment, who wrote too little to evaluate, or who wrote answers that were completely off topic.
Note: The shaded portion represents the percentage of students who achieved or exceeded a **Satisfactory** standard of performance.

Examiners' Comments

The June 1998 diploma examination provided many insights into the ability of students in Social Studies 33 to apply and communicate knowledge and ideas in written form. After five administrations, there is evidence of improvement in students' written work. In January 1996, the mean score on the written portion of the examination was 20.7 out of 40. On the January 1998 examination, the mean score was 22.5 out of 40. Reports from schools and markers indicate that the examination was completed in the allotted time. The majority of students completed all writing assignments.

Writing Assignment I: Contemporary Issues

Writing Assignment I is preceded by an opinion survey that poses seven questions focusing on citizen participation in the political process. The question asked of students was: *How can citizens best participate in the political process?*

This assignment was the easiest on the January 1998 examination. On the *Ideas and Support* scale, 86.6% of students achieved the acceptable standard, while on the *Communication of Ideas* scale, the acceptable standard was achieved by 92.4% of students. Only 0.6% of students received an INS (Insufficient) on this assignment. Markers were, for the most part, encouraged by the strength of student responses on this task. Many students wrote longer compositions that were thoughtful discussions of citizen participation.

Students achieving **(4) Competent** and **(5) Excellent** clearly understood the nuance of the question by focusing on how people can **best** participate in the political process. These students focused their responses clearly on the most effective forms of citizen involvement. This may have involved discussing some actions described in the checklist or the preceding multiple-choice questions, but markers commented that it was clear that these students embraced the topic and fully understood the importance of citizen participation.

It was very common for students achieving **(3) Satisfactory** to use the statements in the opinion survey as a "jumping-off point" and to briefly focus on most, if not all, of the concepts discussed in the statements. Some of these students focused on how **best** to participate, although others offered a more generic discussion of the nature of citizen participation in democracy.

Very few students failed to meet the acceptable standard. Among those who did, many failed to do much more than copy the questions in the survey and add brief additional comments.

Writing Assignment II: Interpreting Visual Images

Section Two of the examination focused on economic systems and contained the Visual Images writing assignment. Students were asked to respond to the question: *What do the photograph and cartoon communicate to you about the strengths and weaknesses of a capitalist economy?*

The visual assignment this year changed slightly. Students were instructed that they could support their explanation by referring to details in the visual sources *and/or* to their understanding of social studies content. In previous administrations, students were specifically instructed to refer to details in the visual images. This change was made in reaction to a concern expressed by many markers that requiring students to refer to details in the visual images tied the hands of markers who read thoughtful, on-topic compositions that made little reference to specific details.

This assignment proved to be more difficult for students than Assignment I. On the *Ideas and Support* scale, 66% of students achieved the *acceptable standard*, while on the *Communication of Ideas* scale, the acceptable standard was achieved by 88.6% of students. An INS mark was given to 3.5% of students.

Among students who have not achieved the *acceptable standard* common problems were an obvious difficulty in drawing a clear message from either image and not seeing any connection between the message offered by one image with that offered in the other.

Students who achieved **(3) Satisfactory** typically structured their compositions in a conventional manner. These students usually discussed the message conveyed by each image, and then the overall message drawn from the pair of images. At this standard of achievement, most students focused on the economic benefits of a free market, followed by a discussion of the existence of poverty amidst plenty.

Students who achieved **(4) Competent** or **(5) Excellent** crafted thoughtful responses, often with perceptive insights. Many of these students discussed a general theme for the images, referring to certain features of the sources for support. A common approach was to recognize the economic benefits of capitalism but also to express concern that such a system may foster significant income disparity and a societal disregard for the plight of the less fortunate.

Writing Assignment III: Comprehension of Generalizations and Concepts

Writing Assignment III required students to recall specific course content to answer the question*: What methods did nations use to maintain peace following the First World War?*

As on previous examinations, this type of question proved to be the most challenging for many students. On the *Ideas and Support* scale, 56.5% of all students achieved the *acceptable standard*, while on the *Communication of Ideas* scale, the acceptable standard was achieved by 75.8% of students. An INS mark was given to 5.8% of students for this assignment.

Many students obviously chose to use the multiple-choice section preceding this writing assignment to help them recall related events. Most of the better writers did this successfully. Unfortunately, some students made poor use of these resources. Markers expressed concern that a number of students discussed the creation of NATO in their responses, even though NATO was formed after the Second World War. This was likely due to the inclusion of NATO as a wrong answer in question 31. Statistics for this question show that the alternative mentioning NATO was the most popular selection after the keyed response (the League of Nations). Similar errors were shown in citing Poland as the nation that constructed the Maginot Line (question 33) and suggesting that, before the Second World War, the Soviet Union tested an atomic bomb (question 38). Because students are encouraged to use the multiple-choice questions as a resource for their writing, the possibility of citing wrong information is always present. Perhaps students need to be instructed to rely more on cited information sources such as quotations and excerpts and on the stems of multiple-choice questions rather than on the four choices offered, thus minimizing the possibility of focusing on a wrong alternative.

Students who did not meet the acceptable standard were generally confused in terms of the efforts that were undertaken by nations in the period under study. Students who achieved **(3) Satisfactory** usually discussed appropriate events in general terms. These compositions may have contained minor historical errors, however these errors did not detract from the general understanding demonstrated. Those students who achieved **(4) Competent** or **(5) Excellent** demonstrated a strong internalized knowledge of the methods used by nations to maintain peace. Many of these students described specific historical examples to illustrate the methods cited.

Writing Assignment IV: Contemporary Issues

Writing Assignment IV is preceded by a fictitious newspaper article focusing on the future of Canada within NATO. The question asked of students was: *Do you think that Canada should remain a member of NATO?* This assignment proved to be manageable for the great majority of students. On the *Ideas and Support* scale, 73.4% of students achieved the *acceptable standard*, while on the *Communication of Ideas* scale, the acceptable standard was achieved by 85.3% of students. Only 2.4 % of students received an INS.

Students achieving **(4) Competent** and **(5) Excellent** showed a clear understanding of what NATO is and of Canada's role in the organization. These students tended to internalize the issue and wrote with conviction about Canadian participation whether they were in favour of or opposed to its continued membership in the alliance.

Students achieving **(3) Satisfactory** provided responses that addressed the assigned task in a general, acceptable fashion. These responses tended to rely heavily on embellishing the arguments provided in the news article. Many of the students who *did not meet the acceptable standard* relied more heavily on the source, frequently adding only minimal additional ideas that could clearly be recognized as their own. This problem of misuse of the article led some markers to express the concern that the article provided too much information, leaving little for students to add. The success of the higher-achieving students however, demonstrates that this is not always the case. Helping students to effectively use the resources provided in the exam should remain a focus of classroom instruction and it is hoped the problems demonstrated with this assignment will lessen over time.

For further information, contact Tim Coates (tcoates@edc.gov.ab.ca) or Elana Scraba (escraba@edc.gov.ab.ca) at the Student Evaluation Branch, 427-0010. To call toll-free from outside of Edmonton, dial 310-0000.

Copyright 1998, the Crown in Right of Alberta, as represented by the Minister of Education, Alberta Education, Student Evaluation Branch, 11160 Jasper Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta T5K 0L2. All rights reserved.

***Alberta educators** may reproduce this document for **non-profit educational purposes**.*